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COMMISSION FOR SOCIAL CARE INSPECTION (CSCI)'S  
INSPECTION OF THE FOSTERING SERVICE

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**Responsible Cabinet Member – Councillor Chris McEwan, Children’s Services Portfolio**

**Responsible Director - Margaret Asquith, Director of Children’s Services**

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**Purpose of Report**

1. To present a summary of the report from the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) following the annual inspection of Darlington Borough Council’s Fostering Service.

**Information and Analysis**

2. The announced inspection took place as part of CSCI’s annual inspection programme. The inspection was carried out over four days ending 6 February 2006. Extra time was set aside to observe the fostering panel. The inspection report was finalised in May 2006, following acceptance of the Action Plan submitted by the Fostering Service managers.
3. The legal basis for fostering inspections is the Care Standards Act 2000 and the National Minimum Standards for Fostering 2002. *Every Child Matters* outlined the government’s vision for Children’s Services and formed the basis of the Children Act 2004. It provides a framework for inspection so that Children’s Services should be judged on their contribution to the outcomes considered essential to wellbeing in childhood and later life:
  - (a) Being Healthy
  - (b) Staying Safe
  - (c) Enjoying and Achieving
  - (d) Making a Positive Contribution
  - (e) Social & Economic Wellbeing

CSCI have re-ordered the National Minimum Standards for Children’s Services under the five outcomes for reporting purposes. A further section has been created under “Management” to cover those issues that will potentially impact on all the outcomes above.

**Inspection Summary**

4. An overview of the inspectors’ findings included :

What the service does well :

- (a) The fostering service is well managed. The manager is held in high regard and the fostering team are committed and experienced “child care” workers. The manager and staff are qualified and have the necessary skills to do their jobs. Foster carers said that they were “generally happy” with the service they receive. They also said good things

about the fostering team. Comments like, “I feel valued by Social Services, they treat me with respect” and “they do get back to you when you leave a message” and “they’re very friendly” were not uncommon.

- (b) Children spoken to said that, they “felt safe” in their placements. The assessment of potential foster carers is thorough. A lot of checks are made of people who want to be foster carers to make sure that they would not harm children. Staff and foster carers are fully aware of the organisation’s Safeguarding Children procedures.
- (c) Children spoken to said that they were “well looked after” and were “helped to stay in contact with their family and friends”. They also said that they were “helped with schoolwork and encouraged to attend school and to do their homework”. Children also said they were “often asked about what they think of things and what affects their lives” as well as “how things could be made better”.
- (d) Children have regular Looked After Reviews (LARs) and are fully involved in them. Children spoken to said, “its good that somebody asks you what you want” and “she’s really nice to talk to”.

What the service could do better :

- (e) The manager of the fostering service should review the Foster Care Agreement form and the register of foster parents to make sure that they both fully meet the requirements of the regulations.
- (f) Staff personnel files also need reviewing, particularly with regard to including photographs of the fostering team, and proof of their identity.
- (g) Membership of the fostering panel needs to be increased to include a local authority Elected Member and a foster parent.

**Being Healthy**

5. The inspectors looked at Standard 12 and reported:

“the fostering service effectively monitors and promotes the health of children. This helps to ensure the wellbeing of all children in foster placements”.

Comments from Young People :

- (a) “I go to the doctors when I’m ill”.
- (b) “My foster carers help me to eat healthily, the food’s nice”
- (c) “They give us the best, healthy nutritional diet”.
- (d) “I go on the trampoline and family walks”.
- (e) “I eat a lot of fruit and am generally fit”.

- (f) “I go to the doctor’s and dentist”.

### **Staying Safe**

6. The inspectors looked at Standards 3, 6, 8, 9 and 15 and reported:

- (a) The manager of the fostering team has the necessary skills and competencies to undertake the role.
- (b) The fostering service provides suitable foster carers from a range of diverse backgrounds.
- (c) The matching of children with suitable foster carers is appropriate. Formal risk assessments take place as part of the matching process, and help to ensure the stability of any placements.
- (d) Staff and carers have a good understanding of child protection procedures and try to make safe, caring and secure placements.
- (e) Those who work for the fostering service are supported to achieve the best possible outcomes for children. The recruitment processes for foster carers support the welfare of children. The recruitment of staff needs to be reviewed in order to safeguard the welfare of children.
- (f) The fostering panel appropriately monitors placements and outcomes for children. Panel membership needs to be reviewed in order to ensure the participation of a local authority elected member.

### Comments from Young People:

- (g) “I have my family around me, not strangers”.
- (h) “I get good food and I get loved”.
- (i) “It’s mint”.
- (j) “I feel safe and well cared for”.
- (k) “Know how to make a complaint if need to”.

### **Enjoying and Achieving**

7. The inspectors looked at Standards 7, 13 and 31 and reported :

- (a) “The fostering service provides placements which promote quality and values diversity.
- (b) “Children placed with foster carers are provided with good support; this promotes their educational achievement.

Comments from Young People :

- (c) “Happy with foster placement and foster carers”.
- (d) “Needs being met”.
- (e) “Get on with foster carers”.
- (f) [Encouraged to] “stick at school”.

**Making a Positive Contribution**

8. The inspectors looked at Standards 10 and 11 and reported:
- (a) “the fostering service makes good provision for the promotion of contact between children, their families and friends”
  - (b) “the fostering service seeks the views of young people about their lives and the care they receive”

Comments from Young People :

- (c) “the fostering team ask us about our foster carers”
- (d) “We are asked what we think about things”

**Social & Economic Wellbeing**

9. The inspectors looked at Standards 14 and 29 and reported:
- (a) “the fostering service and the foster carers contribute towards the preparation of young people for transition into adulthood”;
  - (b) “foster carers receive appropriate allowances and expenses for looking after children”

**Management**

10. The inspectors looked at Standards 1, 2, 4, 5, 16-28 and reported:

“There is a Statement of Purpose, which sets out clearly the aims and objectives of the service.

The fostering service is managed by an appropriately qualified and experienced manager.

The fostering team manager has clear procedures for monitoring and controlling the activities of the fostering service.

The fostering service is managed effectively and efficiently.

Members of staff working in the fostering team are well supported and managed.

The fostering service employs a sufficient number of experienced and qualified staff.

Darlington Borough Council is a fair and competent employer.

Staff within the fostering department receive regular training in order to maintain and enhance their skills.

Staff receive regular supervision and performance appraisal to enable them to continue to provide a good service.

The fostering service has clear strategies for supporting carers.

Supervision and support of foster carers is good. The Foster Care Agreement requires review and updating.

Foster carers are able to access a range of different training to help ensure they have up to date skills and knowledge.

Case files of children contain up to date and comprehensive case records.

The administrative records are well maintained. The register of foster carers' needs should be reviewed in order to ensure that it contains all the essential information required.

The premises used by the fostering team meet the needs of the service.

The service is financially viable and the budget is adequate.

The financial processes of the fostering team are robust and allow for good financial management.”

### **Action Plan**

11. In accordance with CSCI requirements, Fostering Service managers have submitted an Action Plan outlining how Statutory Requirements and Good Practice Recommendations will be addressed.
12. Statutory Requirements include:
  - (a) written agreement to cover matters specified in Schedule 5 of the Fostering Service Regulations [“Matters and Obligations in Foster Care Agreements”]
  - (b) registering the date of the annual review of carers' approval
  - (c) inclusion of at least one elected member on the fostering panel
  - (d) updating of personnel records
13. Good Practice recommendations include:
  - (a) Personal Education Plans on each young person's file;

- (b) Regularity of foster carers' reviews;
- (c) Improvement of informal networking opportunities for foster carers; and
- (d) Involvement of carers to be more clearly evidenced on review documents.

### **Outcome of Consultation**

14. No formal consultation was required to produce this report.

### **Legal Implications**

15. This report has been considered by the Borough Solicitor for legal implications in accordance with the Council's approved procedures. There are no issues which the Borough Solicitor considers need to be brought to the specific attention of Members, other than those highlighted in the report.

### **Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998**

16. The contents of this report have been considered in the context of the requirements placed on the Council by Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, namely, the duty on the Council to exercise its functions with due regard to the likely effect of the exercise of those functions on, and the need to do all that it reasonably can to prevent, crime and disorder in its area. It is considered that the contents of this report do have such effect.

### **Council Policy Framework**

17. The issues contained within this report do not represent a change to the Council's policy framework.

### **Decision Deadline**

18. For the purpose of the 'call-in' procedure this does not represent an urgent matter.

### **Recommendations**

19. It is recommended that Members:-
- (a) Note the findings and recommendations of the CSCI Fostering Report as summarised above; and
  - (b) Note that the full Report and Action Plan are available from the Children's Accommodation Manager on request.

### **Reasons**

20. The recommendations are supported by the following reasons:-
- (a) To comply with statutory requirements to make this report public; and
  - (b) To inform Members of the findings of this report.

**Margaret Asquith,  
Director of Children's Services**

**Background Papers**

CSCI Fostering Inspection Report 2006  
Darlington Fostering Service Action Plan 2006  
Care Standards Act 2000  
National Minimum Standards for Fostering 2002  
The Children Act 2004

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